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ABSTRACT

One of the major challenges for community colleges in the 1980s will be to respond to the increasing diversification of the student population and the trend towards a greater proportion of older, part-time, and women students. This trend will have a significant impact on student services and will require the development of strategies and programs to incorporate adult students' needs into the college's operations and functions. The student development model, which placed the individual at the center of the learning process and sought to marshall institutional resources towards developing students' self-sufficiency, will require significant modification to respond to the particular needs of older students. Research emphasizing the differences between traditional college-age students and adult students provides a framework for modifying the philosophy and functions of student services based on the recognition that adult and traditional students come to college with differing views, attitudes, expectations, and goals. Examples of modifications in important student services areas include: (1) the provision of reliable answers to specific questions about career opportunities rather than general information about the world of work; (2) the development of campus activities geared to adult students' interests in recognition that they may desire and benefit from activities differing from those oriented to traditional students; and (3) the provision of confidence-building efforts as part of orientation or developmental programs. (HB)

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Can Student Services Meet the Challenge of Adult Students?

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Can Student Services Meet the
Challenge of Adult Students?

As higher education moves through the 1980's it will be facing a variety of new challenges. The "golden age" of post-secondary education has become only a faint memory, replaced with the realities of a declining pool of traditional age students, retrenchment, lowered public esteem, rapid inflation, and soring energy costs. The resolution of each of these challenges is a top priority for institutions of higher education.

One challenge that affects all aspects of higher education is the changing face of the student population. Research from the National Center for Education Statistics (1) gives an idea of this changing picture. Enrollment increases are in part-time, older and women students while those students age 18 to 24 comprise a decreasing percentage of the student population. The figures tend to reinforce the trend in student enrollments that many community college administrators have been observing for some years.

As an integral part of the nation's higher education system, and one that is usually at the front lines of societal change, the community college is experiencing a diversification of its student population. Siegal stated, "More and more (community) colleges are host to adults of all ages who are fully engulfed in life, trying to fulfill many roles simultaneously while

having already lived enough years to have well formulated values, priorities and expectations." (2) This statement summarizes a major challenge that community colleges are facing. The difference between the traditional and non-traditional student must be recognized. The community college must incorporate the needs of adults into its daily operations and functions.

While the need to rethink many of the established values and procedures affects all community college operations, one key area affected is student services. Because of its high visibility to high schools, community groups and business, student services must be willing to respond to the new diverse population. The purpose of this article is to examine adult student needs and student services in the community college. Student services has evolved during this century from adhering to a model based around in loco parentis to one of student development. Allowing this evolution to be made was increasing emphasis placed on the individuals and their developmental growth while in college.

Where Student Services Stands

The growth of student services as both a profession and as a function of higher education has spanned this century. During this period of time, the profession has made several attempts to clarify its roles and assert its importance to the educational process. In 1937, The Student Personnel Point of View (3) outlined a holistic approach to viewing college students. Yet, it was not until the 1960's that major steps

were taken to implement a holistic approach and thus change the philosophy behind student services. From these beginnings and with the addition of research from the behavioral sciences, student services as a profession took steps toward the establishment of it current philosophy and identity, i.e. the student development model.

The development of student services in the community college has tended to mirror student services in four year institutions. Through the publications of O'Banion (4), Chickering (5), Medsker (6) and Miller and Prince (7), a general trend can be observed wherein the emphasis is shifted away from a parent model of student services to one that stresses the student's individual growth. Although not directed specifically toward student services, the writings of K. Patricia Cross contribute significantly to advancing the profession. (8,9) Cross stresses the importance of the individual as breakthroughs in the access barriers deluge higher education with new, nontraditional students. These students, with their diverse needs and goals, will force professionals in higher education to modify their ideas on how students learn and how material should be taught. Cross believes that without compromizing academic standards, institutions can cater to individuals' intellectual and interpersonal needs. (9)

With more emphasis on the individual, the breakdown of the concept of <u>in loco parentis</u> and the need to base the student services profession on sound developmental theory, student services was left with a perplexing situation. The old

models were no longer appropriate; yet, a new model was not available. This situation led Creamer and Clowes to state, "Many professionals have become disillusioned with the effectiveness of the traditional student affairs programs. Despite their best efforts, their work has remained essentially outside of instruction. Their theories, and their strategies emphasize services to students and are seen as specialists in the delivery of services". (10) As a solution to this dilemma, the concept of student development began to take hold. O'Banion (4) used it in 1970 and, since that time, the concept has both grown and matured.

Although student services functions go by varied names, it is generally accepted that student development is the recognized underlying philosophy. Based in developmental theory, student development attempts to place the individual as the center of the learning and growing process. The research of Chickering (5), Perry (11), Kohlberg (12) and other theorists gave the profession a framework from which to build. From these theories, the profession advanced a conceptual framework for facilitating individual growth. The concept of student development is not a revamped student personnel program. "It is a set of educational practices grounded in developmental education theory, designed to marshall all available resources within an institution into a process which will produce a predictable result - - self sufficiency in students". (10)

Despite its sound underpinnings and optimistic reception, the student development model, as practiced today, may still be inadequate. This criticism is not directed at the philo-

sophical base on which student development is constructed, but on its failure to broaden its base to serve a growing diversity of the student population. With increasing numbers of older students, student services in community colleges must once again look for a foundation on which to base its programs. This foundation will not come from new research but rather from a rediscovery of the student development concept. While the current approach to student development focuses on developmental growth in the 17-23 year old age period, the new base of student development will look to developmental changes over the entire life cycle.

Expanding the 'Model"

If student services in the community college is to respond to the needs of an older, more diversified student population, it must have a sound comprehension of this population's needs. By virtue of their age, adult students have different perceptions, ideas, and expectations about their education. Student services must be able to see adult students not as traditional college age students,but as diverse individuals facing very different developmental tasks.

One method for examining the differences between the traditional college age student and the adult student is to categorize them by periods or eras of life. This method uses the concepts embedded in psychosocial theory, which is based on the research of Erik Erikson. (13) The basic concept of psychosocial theory is that the life span is divided or separated into discernable stages. At each stage, an individual

must complete, accomplish, or achieve one or more tasks in order to successfully advance to the next stage. Rogers defines a stage as "an interval of time during which a person faces and resolves, either adequately or inadequately, a developmental crisis and its developmental tasks" (14) While there is some continuity between theorists about the developmental tasks of each stage and their timing, individual differences do exist. Theorists that can be categorized as being in the psychosocial family include Erik Erikson, Arthur Chickering, Gail Sheehy, Roger Gould and Daniel Levinson. (14)

A second way to understand adults is through ethical, moral and intellectual development. This large family of theory is referred to as cognitive development. While psychosocial theorists are concerned with the "what" or content of development, cognitive development theories underlie the "how" or processes of student development. (14) This family contends that development is a sequence of stages involving how the individual views the world in reference to individual perceptions and societal influences. The three cornerstones of this family of theory are Kohlberg's stages of moral development, Perry's scheme of ethical and intellectual development, and Loevinger's theory of ego (personality) development.

A third way to analyze the life cycle is by means of what Schlossberg, Troll, and Leibowitz call empirical evidence. (15) These avenues would include (a) physical development, i.e., how the body grows, maintains, and deteriorates over the life span, (b) intellectual development, including the concepts of

crystallized and fluid intelligence, (3) sex role development, concerning how men and women develop their roles in relation to societal norms, environments, etc., and (d) personality development, involving formulating and maintaining one's self concept or viewpoint.

It is important to remember that theories of adult development should not be considered as single, independent dimensions of how people age. Rather, they must be considered cumulative and incorporatable. People age according to different clocks so chronological age may not be a specific measure of developmental growth. (16)

Using the Theories

One of the main contributions of adult development theories is that they permit student services practitioners to construct a conceptual framework fro which to better serve all students, regardless of age. In a practical sense, theories of adult development are more than just paradigms for understanding adults; they are maps or guideposts that student services practitioners can use in facilitating individual developmental growth. Demographic data such as age, sex, marital status, number of children, and educational program selection can often give the student services practitioners valuable information about adult students. Although individual differences make it impossible to hinge developmental tasks on exact age brackets, some generalizations about age and tasks can be assumed. Student services prac-

titioners can thus identify certain developmental tasks and needs that a student could possibly be encountering.

It is important for student services practitioners to recognize that differences in students can exist as a result of their stage in the life cycle. The late adolescent and the middle-aged student do not come to the community college on the same developmental level. Their experiences, expectations, and needs are different. Hameister and Hickey (17) identify two major assumptions about the differences between older adults and traditional college-age students: (1) Self-concept. The traditional college-age student relies on family, school, and community to make major decisions. While in college, adult students want to be self-directing, respected by those in academic, and be treated as adults. (2) Set goals. Adult students enter the institution with a preconceived idea of what they want to learn. This is in contrast to the traditional college-age student to whom the institution feels it can dictate what is to be learned. Thus, student services can use adult development theory as a guide for structuring programs, activities, and services.

The Practical Implications

The influx of older adult students will likely have a great influence on the role and function of student services in the community college. In addition to the need to restructure many services and programs in the academic area, it will also cause a general rethinking of the student development philosophy. Many factors will influence this pro-

cess. The problems of scheduling and distance present major hurdles to the adult student who must perform a delicate balancing act between commitments to family, work, and education. In addition, adult students often do not have the physical or psychological time to devote to education that is permitted the younger student. Therefore, any intervention techniques attempted or services offered by student services must be relevant to the needs of the adult student. (18) Duplication of services or services that do not have immediate or potential value will not be taken advantage of by adult students. To help demonstrate this principle, typical student services functions are listed below with suggested modifications for adult students.

Counseling services

Out of convention and training, community college counselors (academic and career) are more familiar with the developmental tasks and stages associated with the traditional college-age student than with adults. Thus, they may tend to structure their techniques and services to fit the traditional age group. Adult students will not be facing the same developmental tasks as traditional-age students, thus the need to modify the counseling relationship exists. People facing second or even third career changes do not require the same type of career counseling as does the 20 year old. The older adult student may bring to the counseling sessior a wealth of experience already gained in the business

world. He or she will not want general answers about "the world of work" but reliable and adequate answers to very specific questions about career opportunities. Likewise, the adult student will also want specific answers about educational programs and their applicability to job situations. Since some adult students may be experiencing or have progressed through the mid-life transitions, they could be feeling a need to "get on with life" and make a "last chance" change in their life styles. Therefore, time is of great importance. Adult students will be less willing to waste time on tangential educational activities that do not fit educational needs.

Student Activities and Organizations

Probably the least understood area of adult development and its relationship to an educational institution is student activities and organizations. The assumption has always been that because adults have other commitments (family, job, etc.), they do not want to become involved in social or organized activities on the campus. Perhaps this assumption is true in light of the types of programs and activities offered to the adult student. The recently divorced woman may not want to join the business club but may want to find a support group of other divorcees. The 63 year old man may not want to play intramural football in the afternoon but may want to join an evening bowling league composed of "seniors." Offering support systems on either a group or

individual basis meets a major need expressed by adult students. The point here is that to arbitrarily assume that adult students do not desire or could not benefit from participation in campus-related activities is wrong. The student activities coordinator must be imaginative and creative when it comes to adult students. He must know the developmental tasks facing adults at all stages of the life cycle and be willing to structure activities around the successful completion of those tasks.

Developmental Education

No stranger to the community college, developmental or remedial education may be necessary for many adults. Skills that were learned years ago may have to be refreshed as well as updated to meet current requirements of our rapidly changing society. In addition, developmental education can serve as a confidence builder for adult students. The transition to college is often an anxious period for traditional-age students; for the adult students, this period may be particularly stressful. The notion of "you're too old to learn" or "you'll never make it" has been heard too many times by adults contemplating a return to the classroom. "Younger students have major problems of motivation, relationships with peers, learning to make decisions, knowing what they want for their lives. Conversely, older students generally have a harder time adjusting to new situations, have feelings of inadequacy about having been out of school so long, have more family responsibilities and other outside pressures, are

more often working full-time in addition to attending school". (19) Therefore, confidence building programs, either as part of an orientation program or through developmental education experiences should be an integral part of the services offered.

These examples are presented to give the flavor of the kinds of modifications that student services will have to undertake to meet the needs of adult students.

There is more to meeting the developmental needs of adult students than simply the modification of services. Without a sound understanding of why changes are made, they will result in little more than annoyances for the community college staff. Student services practitioners must understand that adult students are not simply traditional college-age students that happen to be older. Their needs, perceptions of college, and reasons for enrolling are different. If student services is to effectively work with adult students, it must recognize these differences and respond accordingly. Counselors must have a commitment to facilitating individual developmental growth in all students, regardless of age. This commitment will require a sound understanding on the part of student services practitioners regarding the processes of how adults age and the developmental tasks they face throughout the life cycle.

Conclusion

As the number of older adult students increases in community colleges, student services practitioners will once again be in search of a model to facilitate developmental growth of all students. To accomplish this endeavor, student services must once again turn to the behavioral and social sciences. The answer to effective student services programs with adults lies in an understanding of how adults mature, grow, and age throughout the course of the life cycle. Through psychosocial and cognitive development theory, student services practitioners can increase their knowledge about the stages of life and their respective developmental tasks. By facilitating success in developmental task completion, student services can take an active part in the growth process of all students.

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